will expect you to attend the family dinner this evening, then T'Pring waits to serve you. I am confident she will give you a healthy child."

"Yes, I would rest, Sarek," Spock said, more concerned for his slave than himself. "Come, James."

Kirk followed as Spock led the way from the entrance hall. Outside an ornate door the Vulcan hesitated, then beckoned Kirk inside.

"The Hall of Ancestors," he said quietly. "Here rest the ashes of my family."

Kirk looked around, finding himself in a long, narrow gallery. It was unfurnished, brightly lit by hanging lamps. Row upon row of small alcoves lined the walls, each containing an ornate box decorated with precious stones. Below each niche was an inscribed tablet, which Kirk found himself able to decipher. They were funerary tablets, describing the lineage and achievements of members of Spock's family. The Vulcan paused before the last alcove, and touched his fingers reverently to the box.

"My mother," he said simply.

Kirk carefully traced the short inscription in memory of the Lady T'Pavra, giving merely her family line, the name of her husband, Sarek, and that of her son.

"She died two years ago," Spock continued. "I am pleased that she lived to hold my son in her arms, and to see the continuation of our family line. It was her great pride that I was accepted for warrior training. I regret that she will not see me initiate."

"I never knew my mother." Kirk reached out impulsively and touched the Vulcan's arm. "At least you did...and you loved her."

Spock made no reply, seemingly absorbed in his memories. Kirk studied the nearby tablets, unwilling to interrupt, until one name made him start in surprise. Below T'Pavra's alcove a small tablet of plain stone had been set into the wall. It bore one word, the name "Amanda."

"That's a human name," Kirk murmured.

"Hmm? Oh, that. It is a custom that a slave who serves the family well be remembered here, although their ashes are not preserved."

"Who was she?"

"Amanda was a Human woman, brought to Vulcan. She served my mother for many years. I remember her well. She nursed me when I was a child, and my mother thought of her almost as a friend. When I was eight years old I was bitten by a poisonous lizard. Amanda sucked the poison from the wound, and died when it entered her body. It was my mother's wish that she be remembered here. T'Pavra bore only one child, and had I died my family, one of the oldest on Vulcan, would have died out in the direct line. So we honor her memory."

"She must have loved you very much." Kirk touched the tablet gently, his thoughts lingering on the long-dead Amanda who had given her life for another woman's child.

"Indeed. But come, Jim, there are only memories here."

Touching Kirk's arm, Spock led him from the hall and along the corridor into a separate wing of the house.

"My private apartments," he explained. "My father maintains a large household, but these rooms are exclusively mine. At the moment I possess no slaves save you, so my father will supply attendants to wait upon us."

"It's magnificant," Kirk breathed, glancing around the room in which they stood. Two walls, and the bed, were draped with embroidered hangings, richly barbaric in design. The door through which they had entered formed a part of a painted wall depicting a young warrior hunting. Kirk thought he detected a resemblence to Spock. In the fourth wall a series of arched doors opened onto a terrace and a walled garden beyond, from which he could hear the soft splashing of a fountain.

"Lashmi! Have you come to greet me, old friend?" Spock knelt down beside a large hunting cat, fondling the great head affectionately. The beast purred at his touch. "Come and make friends with her, Jim. She is too old to accompany me now, but her cubs are in training. I will give one to you."

Kirk leaned down to stroke the soft fur. Large green eyes studied him, then a rough tongue washed his face thoroughly. Kirk laughed, and scratched the pricked ears, earning a deep, throaty purr.

"Good. Now she knows you. Old as she is, Lashmi would tear an intruder apart, but she will protect anything of mine."

Rising, Spock lifted a hanging and led Kirk into a well-appointed bathroom. Two slaves came forward to help them undress, and attend them in the bath.

"As my personal slave, you are to be waited on here," Spock explained as they returned to the bedroom. "Unfortunately," he continued ruefully, "I must deny myself the pleasure of your body. Tonight I must fulfill my duty to my family, but I confess I find the thought of you infinitely more appealing."

"More than T'Pring?"

"I have never seen her. My father selected her as the most suitable candidate."

"Candidate?" Kirk was puzzled, aware of how little he knew of Vulcan marriage customs.

"To bear my son. She will be, of course, a member of our family, but from one of the lesser branches. Since she has little to offer as a bride-gift, it has been difficult for her father to arrange a suitable match. But as the mother to the heir to the House, however, she will be well provided for, and an acceptable husband found. Do you understand?"

"Not really," Kirk confessed. "I know the warriors have no use for women, but it seems none of you do. How does T'Pring feel about this. You don't treat your women much better than slaves."

"You wouldn't say that if you knew my Aunt T'Kara," Spock said. "One day I will explain it all to you, but be satisfied that T'Pring is more pleased than I am with the match. Now we should rest."

One of the slaves drew curtains to shade the windows as Spock stretched himself on the bed, resting his head on Kirk's chest. The Human closed his arms around his master and held him while he slept. He did not understand, himself least of all, but this was the only happiness he knew anymore, just holding Spock close. This he would enjoy while he could.